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SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, EAP/EP, OES/EGC, OES/STC
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR ANE, G/ENV, EGAT/ESP (CHIP BARBER)
STATE PASS TO EPA/OIA (DENNIS CUNNINGHAM AND MARK KASMAN)
STATE PASS TO NOAA/NOS/OIA (JONATHAN JUSTI)
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE/INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS (CYNTHIA MACKIE AND
KELLI YOUNG)
BANGKOK PASS TO RDMA

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KFLU](#) [KHIV](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: INTERIOR DELEGATION JOINS ASSISTANT SECRETARY MCMURRAY TO
OPEN U.S.-SUPPORTED CLIMATE CHANGE INSTITUTE

¶1. (U) Summary: From November 17-22, a delegation from the U.S. Department of the Interior, led by Deputy Assistant Secretary Timothy Petty, visited Hanoi and the Mekong Delta to promote U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation on responses to climate change. In Hanoi, a member of the delegation signed the charter for the new U.S.-Vietnam climate change working group, created during Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's recent visit to Washington in June. The delegation joined Assistant Secretary for Oceans, Environment and Science Claudia McMurray and Ambassador Michalak at the opening ceremony for the Interior-supported Delta Research and Global Observation Network (DRAGON) Institute at Can Tho University. Both events attracted broad and positive press coverage. End Summary.

United States-Vietnam Climate Change Working Group Charter

¶2. (U) At a ceremony presided over by Vice Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Nguyen Cong Thanh and Ambassador Michalak, Dr. Gregory Smith, Director of the U.S. National Wetlands Center within the U.S. Geological Survey, and Dr. Tran Thuc, Director General of the Vietnam Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment within MONRE, signed the charter for the U.S.-Vietnam climate change working group under the bilateral Science and Technology Agreement. Following the announcement of the formation of the working group during Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's visit to Washington in June, the two governments selected Smith and Thuc as co-chairmen. With Embassy assistance, the co-chairs now will select members for the working group, which likely will hold its initial meeting in Hanoi next June. Prior to the signing, Vice Minister Thanh urged additional bilateral cooperation to respond to the challenges of climate change.

¶3. (U) At the Ministry of Science and Technology, Vice Minister Le Dinh Tien reaffirmed his support for the U.S.-Vietnam climate change working group and for the U.S. Geological Survey-supported Delta Research and Global Observation Network (DRAGON) Institute at Can Tho. MOST officials noted overall GVN excitement over the climate change working group and wanted it to serve as a model for other working groups under the bilateral Science and Technology Agreement.

NGO Roundtable

14. (U) To broaden the scope of U.S.-Vietnamese engagement on climate change, the delegation participate in a roundtable with local and international NGOs, during which Smith expressed his hope that the DRAGON Institute could coordinate its efforts with those funded by other donors and by NGOs. The group also toured the Hanoi dike system to study similarities and differences between the Red River Delta and the Mississippi Delta and spoke to a group of school children about climate change and environmental science.

DRAGON Institute Opening

15. (U) On November 20, Assistant Secretary McMurray joined the Interior delegation and Ambassador Michalak to attend the commencement of the DRAGON Institute at Can Tho University - the first of its kind in the world. At the ceremony, attended by over 100 academics and local officials, VIMHE's Thuc expressed the threat from climate change to Vietnam's significant poverty reduction successes. The Rector of Can Tho University noted that DRAGON initiatives could assist Vietnamese climate change adaptation capacity, boost food security, and improve ecosystem management. McMurray highlighted DRAGON as an example of U.S. support for science-based responses to global warming. Ambassador Michalak emphasized that the DRAGON Institute fit into ongoing U.S.-Vietnam climate change cooperation and was consistent with overall U.S. support for Vietnamese health and environmental programs.

Mekong Delta Tour

16. (U) Following the DRAGON Institute opening, the Interior

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delegation and their counterparts from Can Tho University toured shrimp farms, rice farms, agricultural research stations, and mangrove swamps in Bac Lieu and Soc Trang provinces to gather more first-hand knowledge of climate change impacts and Vietnamese responses. USGS will use this information to better tailor DRAGON products to fit Vietnamese needs, while gaining a clearer picture of similarities and differences with the Mississippi Delta.

Press Coverage

17. (U) The delegation's visit to Hanoi and the DRAGON opening ceremony attracted widespread and positive press coverage on the critical issues of climate change which is an area of growing focus in the Vietnamese media. Local and international press provided detailed reports on the ceremonies for the signing of the climate change working group charter and the opening of the DRAGON Institute, emphasizing growing U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation. Hanoi television also broadcast a report of the delegation's visit to the local Hanoi elementary school. The Vietnamese press ran stories over a several day period, in conjunction with pieces covering Assistant Secretary McMurray's separate itinerary focusing on wildlife protection.

MICHALAK